



Coal Ash Talking Points

Background:

Coal ash is the toxic byproduct of burning coal to generate electricity. For decades, there were no regulations on the books to govern storage of this dangerous waste, meaning that across Virginia – and the U.S. – this waste has been combined with water and stored in outdated, unlined pits.

Following recent spills from coal ash ponds in Tennessee and North Carolina, the latter affecting much of Southside Virginia in early 2014, EPA announced rules requiring closure of coal ash impoundments across the U.S. and for future waste generated by coal plants to be stored in lined impoundments. EPA gave utilities three options to dispose of existing coal ash waste once the impoundments are drained: cap the waste in place with a synthetic liner and soil; repurpose the waste into a useful product; or excavate leftover coal ash into a lined impoundment, such as a landfill.

Virginia is home to multiple coal ash ponds operated by both Dominion Power and Appalachian Power Company (APCO). Dominion Power has 11 coal ash ponds at four sites: Bremo Power Station in Fluvanna County; Possum Point Power Station in Prince William County; Chesterfield Power Station in Chesterfield County; and Chesapeake Energy Center in the City of Chesapeake.

Dominion has already obtained dewatering permits to drain ponds at both Bremo and Possum Point and water permits are pending at Chesapeake and Chesterfield (as of July 13, 2016). The dewatering process is the first step toward closure. Our real fight centers around how to deal with the millions of tons of solid coal ash waste Dominion wants to leave onsite.

Talking Points:

Dominion's coal ash is already polluting waterways:

- Dominion Power plans to close its coal ash impoundments through “cap in place” practices at all of its sites, even though data monitoring has already revealed the presence of heavy metals (arsenic, chromium, lead etc.) in ground and surface water. By not removing this waste from unlined pits, Dominion is jeopardizing long-term public health and water quality.

- In North Carolina, 89% of wells tested for water quality near Duke Energy's coal-fired power plants failed to meet the standards for safe drinking. Here in Virginia, arsenic concentrations at one well near the Dominion Virginia Power Chesapeake Energy Center have been shown to be 30 times higher than the safe standard.



- A new Duke University study showed that contaminated water is leaking from coal ash ponds at the Bremo Bluff and Chesterfield power stations. This polluted water is draining directly into our local rivers and contains elevated levels of arsenic, boron, and other chemicals. Arsenic concentrations at one Bremo Bluff test site were 4 times the EPA mandated limit. Independent testing done on wells near the Possum Point power station found elevated levels of hexavalent chromium, a chemical shown to drastically elevate cancer rates.

- Cap in place does not guarantee the prevention of chemicals further leaching into groundwater. In fact, one study published in Applied Geochemistry showed that arsenic leaches through the soil 50 times faster in capped environments compared to open-air ones.

Their Cost arguments are bogus:

- Dominion repeatedly points to cost as their rationale for pursuing cap-in-place, claiming that it would run \$3 billion to excavate their 11 ponds. In comparison, Georgia Power has estimated it will cost \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion to close 29 ponds in their state, including full excavation of 16 impoundments near waterways. A South Carolina utility company is currently removing 11 million tons of ash for a mere \$22 per ton. It's clear that Dominion wants to get this done as quickly and cheaply as possible – an irresponsible path forward.

- The costs of contamination outweigh the costs of compliance. A study done by scientists with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the USDA Forest Service shows that the cost to fish and wildlife alone over the past 45 years from 21 confirmed damaged sites exceeds \$2.3 billion. The projected cost of damage to fish and wildlife over the next 50 years is projected to be \$3.85 billion.

- One estimate for the economic damage done to the Dan River communities following the spill is placed at \$1 million per impacted mile, totaling \$70 million. This estimate accounts for the loss of fish and wildlife, loss of real estate value, and regional tourism decreases

- The best option is to store coal ash in modern, lined landfills, where contaminants can no longer leach into the soil and risk of water contamination is minimized. The EPA has mandated that all new coal ash facilities be lined. Dominion Power is currently constructing a modern facility to store coal ash at the Chesterfield power facility. Water testing in South Carolina wells has shown up to a 99 percent decrease in arsenic concentrations after local coal ash landfills were excavated and moved to modern holding facilities.